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1. SYRIA

The recent wave of arrests and the charges of "imperialist-backed" antiregime plotting in Damascus reflect the continuing instability of the radical Baathist military regime. Rival military factions are still jockeying for power, and the political situation is extremely fragile.

The regime claimed on 9 September that it had crushed a second reactionary coup attempt within 48 hours. Major Salim Hatum, the commando leader who triggered the February 1966 coup which brought the present radical Baathist clique to power, has been accused of having led a plot in collaboration with leaders of the ousted moderate faction of the Baath. Several of these leaders had escaped from prison in Syria last week, and Hatum has now been granted political asylum in Jordan.

Religious rivalries have played a large part in the recent conflicts. Major Hatum, a member of the minority Druze sect, has reportedly opposed the ascendancy of members of the rival Alawite sect within the military. At the same time, the Sunni Muslims --who constitute a majority of the Syrian population --resent the present influence of the minority groups within the army.

The continuing tension is certain to encourage further unrest. The leaders of the Syrian General Confederation of Labor Unions (GCLU)--who of late have adopted an increasingly strident "anti-imperialist" posture--have already taken advantage of the political fragmentation to inaugurate a series of arrests of "reactionary" officials within nationalized business establishments. The government is said to oppose the GCLU's campaign, but is apparently too weak at the moment to put a stop to the purges.

There is as yet no evidence that the Syrian Communist Party has played a direct role in the recent events. The party is probably now waiting in the wings to see which Baathist faction comes out on top and taking advantage of the mounting confusion to try to develop its own influence.

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3. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

President Balaguer's military reorganization designed mainly to reduce the power of potential dissidents in the armed forces is finally under way. The shift of part of General Wessin's former command to other army units has begun. Military leaders are generally aware of Balaguer's plans and so far have not publicly opposed them.

Balaguer has endorsed a US program of gradual military reform aimed at professionalization, economy, and increased effectiveness. His main interest in pushing for significant changes, however, is to reduce the ability of Wessin's old units and of the air force to challenge his rule.

Balaguer is apparently toying with making changes in the top military leadership. Senior army officers claim that he has been considering replacement of the minister of defense and the army and the air force commanders. The conduct of the top military leaders appears satisfactory, but they are not old-line Balaguer loyalists, a quality the President prizes.

Leadership changes could lead to a resurgence of military elements associated with the corruption and brutality of the Trujillo era. One such officer, Colonel Nivar, remains influential as a presidential adviser. The US military attaches believe the armed services would probably not accept his appointment to a responsible command position.

Balaguer hopes to disperse the armored forces formerly led by Wessin, which are now in one unit, and to shift the air force's ground troops to the army before the Inter-American Peace Force leaves two weeks from now. The IAPF is now down to 2,400 US and 500 Brazilian troops. Balaguer will be carefully eyeing their departure as he moves ahead with the delicate business of military change.

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